

*Melissa*

There's something about the smell of books—simple, innocent—reminiscent of elementary school and a time of endless possibilities. And when stress elbows its way into my composure like an offensive tourist, the library's where I retreat. Because nothing catastrophic ever happens in a library.

We start in the children's section, the kids and I. Well, Eli and me. At the age of eleven, Emily's too sophisticated to be seen amid the colorful covers of picture books, and Josh's nine-year-old self wouldn't be caught *dead* hanging out with his mother.

I grimace at the construction paper jack-o-lanterns that decorate the wall. Halloween is more than a month away. Why the big rush? It's not like the library needs to cash in on commercialism.

“Read this one, Mommy.” Eli shoves *Where the Wild Things Are* at me.

“I read that to your class just last week, buddy. Why don't we try something new?”

“But it's my favorite.” He works me with his Bambi eyes, little blond brows drawn together. Just like his dad. How can I say no?

In a quiet corner, we settle side-by-side in an empty beanbag chair. Before I've finished rattling off the title, miniature bodies appear as if Eli's communicated to them by some secret kid code. In a flash, I'm the Pied Piper and this is my little Hamlet. A smile tugs at my mouth and fills my spirit.

“*Where the Wild Things Are*,” I repeat for the crowd. “By Maurice Sendak.” I turn the page. “The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief...” Eli tucks his head beneath my chin, and I inhale the scent of sweaty boy.

Can life get any better than this?

I let this morning's argument with Trevor dissipate in the lyrical prose—forget the last two weeks of his getting home later and later. Chalk up his recent moodiness to artistic temperament and embrace gratitude.

A Shirley Temple lookalike leans against my thigh, and I flash her a smile. Something akin to grape jelly stains the corners of her mouth. I suppose it would be awkward to fish a tissue from my pocket and wipe it.

Eli takes charge of the page turning until...

“The end.” With a flourish, I close the book. Ten pairs of eyes look up at me, as if waiting for an encore.

“Read it again,” Eli demands.

“Yeah,” a couple voices chime in.

“How about this?” I struggle to get my larger-than-child-size fanny out of the beanbag nest and hand the book to Eli. “Why don't you read it aloud for everyone?”

He scrunches up his nose. “Okay.”

One brave boy plops into my spot as Eli opens the book and clears his throat in preparation for his debut.

I wander through the library, my fingers trailing across the bindings of books, my thoughts back to this morning. Why is dissatisfaction creeping its way into my soul? I love my life. I *do*. It's just...helping out in Eli's class a couple days a week isn't doing it for me anymore. I want to be more than a wife and mother. I want to be *more*, period.

Heading into the hobby section, I find Emily sitting on the floor, red hair cascading around a book open on her folded legs. I shove the dissatisfaction to the back of my mind. For now.

“What are you reading?”

Eyes still tracking the page, she holds the book up so I can see the title—

*Woodworking Basics: Mastering the Essentials of Craftsmanship.*

“What? *Millicent Girl Genius* isn’t available?”

“Dad said he’d make me a hope chest. If I learn a few things, maybe he’ll let me help.”

“Sounds reasonable.”

“Can we go now?” Josh’s voice reaches my ears before I see him. When will he learn the concept of a library voice? He materializes at the end of the isle.

“You find a book?” I ask him.

He raises two magazines—Hot Rod.

“Hate to break it to you, kiddo, but those aren’t books.”

“They got articles. Hey, Em, what’re you reading?”

She sighs and holds up her book again.

“That’s for guys. You should look for a cookbook or something.”

Emily glares, and I groan.

“Don’t start that again.”

“What? Dad says—”

“Never mind what Dad says. Let’s go find you a book without pictures.” I hustle him away from Em before she can do damage.

“Can we get pizza on the way home?”

“Why not?” Trevor won’t be home for dinner.

Again.

Maybe I can tempt him with a pizza—his favorite. One quick text...